FORMATION OF DISCURSIVE COMPETENCE IN EFL CLASS

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ABSTRACT

The educational system of the present day in Russia puts forward new and new challenges: searching for novel ways of forming various competences of university students, with discursive competence dominating. In this paper, the authors make an attempt to prove that teaching students to write with argumentation in EFL class can become the basis for the formation of their discursive competence. Materials and instruments as well as teaching techniques of forming discursive competence in EFL class are investigated. The leading research method implemented in this study is an experiment conducted by the authors with the aim in view to assess the level of discursive competence that students can reach in EFL class. Drawing on methodical literature and personal teaching experience, the authors offer an authentic model of forming discursive competence in EFL class. The findings of the research can serve as general recommendations for university faculty and can be used in EFL class.

1. INTRODUCTION

The introduction of new educational standards in the higher education system of the Russian Federation asks for inventing new approaches to solving the problem of formation of common cultural competencies of university students.

In this study, the problem of formation of discursive competence of students in EFL class was under focus.

Many researchers in education and language teaching (Kabardov & Artsishevskaya, 1996; Dijk, 1998; Karasik, 2000; Levitan, 2001; Solovova, 2002; Grishanova, 2004; Zimniya, 2004; Khytorskoy, 2005; Akimova, 2006; Ivanov, Mitrofanov, & Sokolova, 2006; Shchukin, 2006; Perfilova, 2008; Mikheeva, 2010; Kolkova, 2011; Sipols, 2011; Pasechnaya, Skomorokhova, & Yurtaev, 2013; Yevstigneyeva, 2013; Fahrutdinova, Fahrutdinov & Konopatskaya, 2014; Abdrafikova, Akhmadullina & Yarmakeev, 2015; Pimenova & Yarmakeev, 2015 and others) state that the high level of formation of discursive skills helps students to overcome difficulties of growing up and optimizes their relationship with the surrounding that contributes to the harmonization of the individual relationships with others. Only a few approaches to solving the problem of formation of discursive competence of students in EFL class have been developed though, among them the practical implementation of modern information and communication technologies that maximizes the effective realization of such principles as individualization, differentiation and improves the visualization of teaching materials to motivate students to be independent in the learning process (Yevstigneyeva, 2013).

In this paper, the authors described an original way of investigating the problem and offered an authentic model of forming discursive competence in EFL class. Teaching students to write with argumentation in EFL class was regarded to be an effective teaching technique to achieve the goal.

2. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK AND LITERATURE REVIEW

The formation of discursive competence through its active implementation into the sphere of education while learning a foreign language tends to be extremely important (Akimova, 2006).

Let us consider the notion of discursive competence in terms of English teaching methodology.

Dijk (1998) claims that discourse has a special function, since it is only through language use, discourse or communication (or other semiotic practices) a person's ideas can be explicitly formulated.

Karasik (2000) allocates the status-role and situational-communicative discourse characteristics, including communication conditions, the scope of communication, goals, motives, strategies of the implementation of communicative acts, genre and stylistic characteristics. In addition, the linguist distinguishes status-oriented and student-centered types of discourses. The first determines the nature of communication in accordance with the scope of activities; the second's priority is in everyday acts, everyday communication and literature.

According to Solovova (2002), discursive competence is the ability to organize speech; to manifest a high level of formation of logical skills and consistence; to form a skill to create a convincing design of a personal statement; to acquire techniques of giving and getting information.

Zimniaya (2004) defines "competence" as knowledge-based intellectual and personal experience of a person. In her view, competence cannot be considered as having come to use hidden potential.

Ivanov, Mitrofanov and Sokolova (2006) think that a competence approach in education streamlines the processes of obtaining and interpreting diagnostic results and provides the subjective assessment of students' skills.

Yevstigneyeva (2013) regards discursive competence as a body of knowledge, skills and abilities which allow building and understanding discourses as objects of reality in the situation of communication in the process of professional activity.

Auhadeeva (2014) considers a competence building approach in education to be a basic development strategy of general and professional education in Russia. Communicative competency of the teacher is treated by the researcher as "meta-competency" that builds up both professional competency of the student and his personal communicative culture.

Fahrutdinova, Fahrutdinov and Konopatskaya (2014) advocate the point of view that cultural competencies enable students to orient themselves in the cultural space and to maintain a dialogue with the representatives of other cultures. At the present day, the process of formation of common cultural competencies of students, discursive competence including, should correlate with the new educational standards that are introduced in the higher education system in Russia and with the process of its integration in the world educational space.

The necessity of the identification of specific conditions of formation of pedagogical communicative competence was recognized by Abdrafikova, Akhmadullina and Yarmakeev (2015).

Thus, literature review showed that the role of forming discursive competence in EFL class has not been thoroughly studied; many educators recognize the importance of its forming though.

3. MATERIALS AND STUDY INSTRUMENTS

3.1. Students' Background
Number, age and gender characteristics: 62 students, 20-22 years old, mixed who made up two groups: group A – control, group B – experimental.

Students' status: bachelor students.

3.2. Research Sites
Leo Tolstoy Institute of Philology and Intercultural Communication in Kazan (Volga region) Federal University.

3.3. Studied materials

3.3.1. The training materials
The training materials included test tasks, essay topics and detailed writing help strategies.

3.3.2. The basics of paragraphs and essays
Writing is a way of communicating. Effective writing, however, is not just somebody's spoken words put on paper. In writing, one must pay special attention to making his ideas clear and convincing and know strategies and techniques that he can use to produce effective writing.

Writing assignments require writing either a paragraph, or an essay. Although such compositions may differ in their length and content, a paragraph and an essay are alike in two important ways. First, each one should have an idea. Second, their main ideas must be explained or developed by the writer. Among the methods of development most frequently used by writers are:

- narration
- description / definition
- examples
- classification and division
- comparison and contrast
- cause and effect
- argumentation and persuasion.

The ability to state an idea and to develop it so that it is clear to a reader is essential to all forms of writing (Pimenova and Yarmakeev, 2015).

3.4. Discursive competence components

Component	Definition
Proposition	True component statements, its semantic constant, which is able to receive in the context its logical-semantic status of truth or falsity.
Reference	Relatedness expressed in a speech to the objects of reality.

Explicature	Explicitly expressed in the judgment statement, its meaning and purpose in accordance with the communicative intention of the author.
Implicature	Non-literally expressed value and meaning of the utterance, hidden context, founded by the author. Implicate meaning can be adequately decoded by the recipient with following a number of conditions.
Presupposition	Semantic component of the discourse, the truth of which does not allow the statement to be semantically abnormal, out of place in this context.
Relevance	Conclusions resulting from the interaction of the newly acquired knowledge to those in the past. The component provides the implementation of the cognitive function.

3.5. Diagnostic methods
3.5.1. Experimental criteria and indicators

Based on the analysis of the structural model of discursive competence in the implementation of the ascertaining experimental criteria and indicators for the evaluation of the formation of discursive competence were identified. They included:

- cognitive component – knowledge of a foreign language professionally-directed terminology; knowledge of phonetic, lexical, syntactic, and other language subsystems; knowledge of socio-cultural and historical features of the country the language is spoken;
- activity component – skills' analysis, synthesis, systematization, compilation of information data, manipulating information flows; skills of creating coherent and syntactically correct own monologues, dialogical discourse of a foreign language;
- communicative component – abilities to work in a team, to organize co-operation in the implementation of group activities, to exercise tolerance and to take responsibilities;
- reflective component – skills of critical analysis of information, a person's own achievements and shortcomings, pursuit of continuous improvement of the professional level and personal training through the use of a foreign language (Yevstigneyeva, 2013).

3.5.2. Diagnosis of the formation of discursive competence of students

To test the above criteria and indicators a sampling of diagnostic techniques was carried out, allowing to adequately assess the level of formation of individual personality traits of students required for the formation and development of discursive competence. Selected diagnostic tools are presented in Table 1.

Table 1. Diagnostic tools of evaluation of formation and development of discursive competence

Criterion	Researched indicators	Diagnostic methods
Cognitive	knowledge of a foreign language professionally-directed terminology, knowledge of phonetic, lexical, syntactic, and other language subsystems; knowledge of socio-cultural and historical features of the country the language is spoken;	Testing through the use of ICT, Test FCE on-line.
Activity	skills' analysis, synthesis, systematization, compilation of information data, manipulating information flows; skills of creating a coherent and syntactically correct own monologues, dialogical discourse of a foreign language;	Diagnosis of self-actualization (A.V. Lazukin adapted by N.F. Kalina https://sites.google.com/site/test300m/dsl) .
Communicative	ability to work in a team, to organize co-operation in the implementation of group activities, exercise tolerance and take responsibilities;	Diagnosis of accepting others (by Feyya scale. http://www.gurutestov.ru/test/308)
Reflective	skills of critical analysis of information, one's own achievements and shortcomings, the pursuit of continuous improvement of the professional level and personal training through the use of a foreign language.	Diagnosis of personal and group satisfaction with the educational process.

The diagnosis of the level of formation of all discursive components was conducted in two steps. The first one comprised 7 sections, presented at Englishtests.com (http://www.englishtests.com/). Task sections were aimed at identifying the level of development of learners' grammatical system of the English language (sections 1 - 2) and reading skills (sections 3 - 7), the understanding of the content of a foreign language text, features of different genres and styles of discourse. The second step was to evaluate students' writing skills with argumentation and how well they could use writing help strategies.

4. SUMMARY

At the initial stage of the experiment while accomplishing the test tasks on understanding the content of the texts of various genres many semantic mistakes were made. Students demonstrated a thorough understanding of inadequate syntax of simple and complex sentences, observed the situation of misunderstanding of logic, structured text components though.

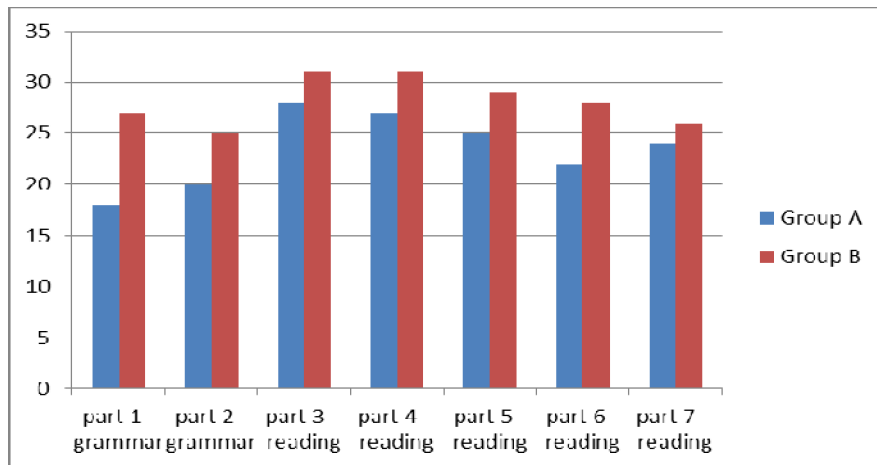The results of the tasks of the ascertaining experiment are presented in Fig. 1.

Fig. 1. *The results of the tasks of the ascertaining experiment.*

The writing part revealed the incompetence of the majority of students in both groups in writing essays with argumentation.

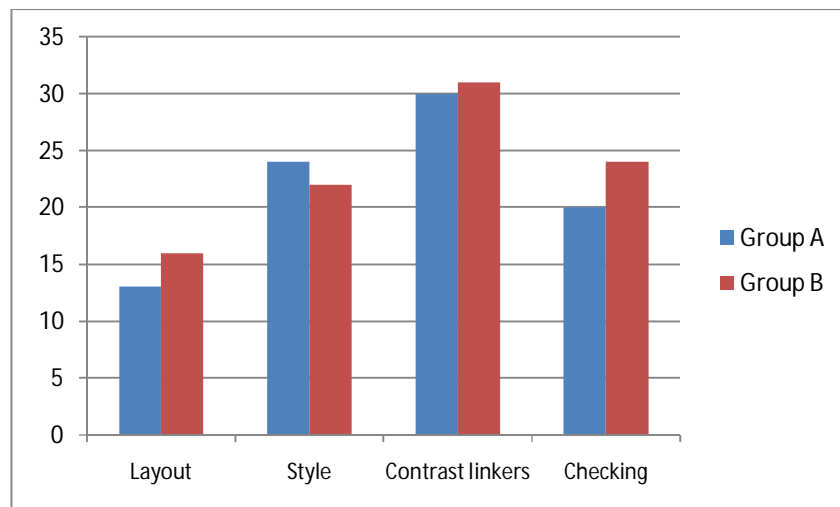The results of the tasks of the ascertaining experiment are presented in Fig. 2.

Fig. 2. *The results of the tasks of the ascertaining experiment.*

Identified in the course of the ascertaining experiment, criteria of the formation of discursive competence at the university were the basis of the formative experiment. The purpose of the forming experiment was to increase the level of formation of discursive competence of students. To check the level of formation of the components of discursive competence, the whole complex of diagnostic methods was used, which was resorted to the ascertaining stage of the experiment.

At the final stage, diagnostics of the results of discursive competence was carried out.

The qualitative analysis of the results of assignments by students of the experimental group is shown in Fig. 3.
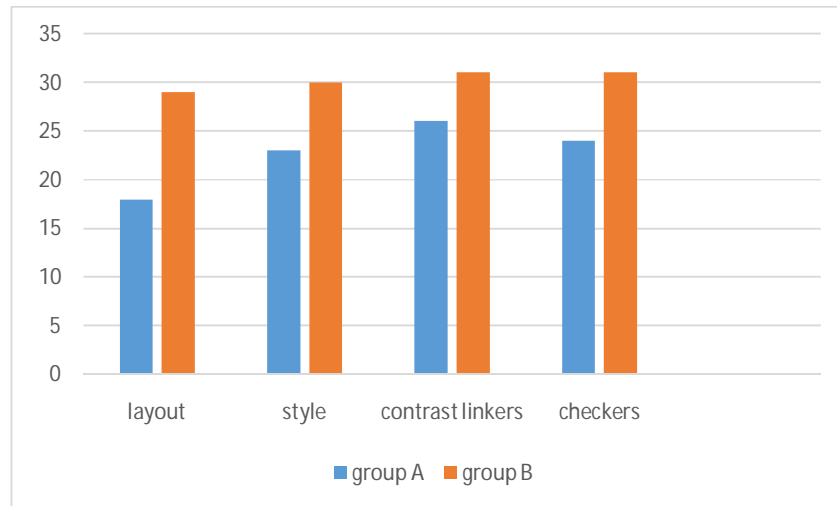
Fig. 3. *Results of the final stage of the experiment.*

On the basis of the total points provided for the tasks accomplishment, 3 levels of formation of discursive competence of students were identified:

- High level - 60-90 points.
- Average level - 30-60 points.
- Low level - 0-30 points.

5. CONCLUSION

In this study, the authors investigated the problem of forming discursive competence in EFL class. For the realization of the goal an original way was modeled: writing essays with argumentation. The approbation of the described model of the formation of discursive competence in EFL class proved itself positively.

A new model can add to solving the problem of formation of a set of common cultural competencies of university students which includes discursive competence as priority. Mastery of writing principles helped students to develop their discursive competence, which can be applied to a great many kinds of writing projects they might encounter both at school and in their career or business.

The authors share an opinion that the formation of students' discursive competence in ESL class is possible on the base of the offered model.

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